

VZCZCXRO4692
RR RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHYE #0296/01 0980302
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 070302Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7345
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION WASHINGTON DC
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0627
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0587

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000296

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL KJUS AM

SUBJECT: ARMENIAN GENERAL'S SON ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED IN MURDER, BUT NOT CHARGED

YEREVAN 00000296 001.2 OF 002

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶11. (SBU) Armenia's Association of Investigative Journalists has reported that the son of a notorious retired army general and Member of Parliament, Seyran Saroyan, has escaped justice for his alleged participation in the March 13 murder of a youth from Edjmiadzin. The murder allegedly took place at the orders of the general himself, who had become enraged when hearing three rival youth had wounded his son with a knife. These youth had reportedly tried to stop the general's son's unwelcome advances toward a young lady in the city. Police have charged one of the general's distant relatives with premeditated murder, but it remains unclear whether that relative was indeed present at the scene. This and other similar incidents in recent years reinforce the impression of many ordinary Armenians that there is a class of well-connected individuals and oligarchs here who, along with their families and security details, can rob, kill, and maim with impunity. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND OF THE MURDER: GENERAL'S ORDER FROM MOSCOW

¶12. (SBU) On March 21 the Association of Investigative Journalists published a report in its online Hetq (Trace) journal detailing the murder of the 23-year-old Sepuh Karapetian. Basing its report on a friend of the deceased who wished to remain anonymous out of fear of retaliation, Hetq reported that Zarzand Saroyan, the son of the notorious retired army general, former corps commander, and Member of Parliament Seyran Saroyan, participated in the murder along with his father's bodyguards and a relative. The anonymous friend told Hetq that his friend was murdered in retaliation for trying to ask Zarzand Saroyan to cease his unwelcome advances toward an Edjmiadzin young lady. When Karapetian, his brother and another friend raised the issue with Saroyan, a fight broke out, and Karapetian's friend wounded Zarzand with a knife -- allegedly in self-defense. Hetq wrote in its March 21 report that Edjmiadzin police initially brought criminal charges against Sepuh's older brother for his involvement in the altercation.

¶13. (SBU) Upon learning about the incident the same day, General Saroyan, who was in Moscow at the time, allegedly urged his son to exact revenge on the youth. The younger Saroyan, with approximately eight of the ex-general's bodyguards, then allegedly proceeded to

track down the three youth and, upon locating them, subjected them to a savage beating. According to Karapetian's anonymous friend, when the 23-year-old's body was found, it showed signs of torture. Karapetian's shoes and socks had been removed and his feet beaten to a pulp; the deceased's legs had turned white from repetitive blows; and his hands had been pierced by a sharp implement in the manner of a crucifixion. (NOTE: General Saroyan is a member of the ruling Republican Party of Armenia faction in the parliament, though not a member of the party itself. END NOTE.)

POLICE RESPONSE PUZZLING

¶4. (SBU) On March 14 the Police posted a report on its website that they had received a phone call late on March 13 from the 2nd Yerevan Hospital stating it had received a patient from Echmiatsin who died without regaining consciousness. The initial examination of the body showed wounds to the face and head. Police later identified the man as Sepuh Karapetian. Upon an inquiry from the Embassy, Sayat Shirinian, spokesperson of Armenia's national police, told Emboff that an investigation into the death was in progress, but that he could provide no further details. Shirinian, who during the conversation showed his lack of familiarity with details of the case, surmised to Emboff that Hetq's online report would be checked during the investigation.

¶5. (SBU) In a follow-up report, Hetq reported that on March 31 the Public Relations Division of the Police had informed them about the arrest of Arayik Saroyan in connection with the case, who has since been charged with premeditated murder. Arayik Saroyan is reportedly the second cousin of General Saroyan, through the General's father's side of the family. According to Hetq, General Saroyan's father was present at the scene of the crime with eight other persons. Hetq has been unable, however, to ascertain whether Arayik Saroyan was indeed there as well.

YEREVAN 00000296 002.2 OF 002

AUTOPSY COVER-UP ALLEGED WHILE YOUTH IN HIDING

¶6. (SBU) According to the anonymous source of Hetq's report, Yerevan forensic experts who examined Karapetian's corpse unsuccessfully tried to conceal the signs of torture. The same source said the victim's family had initially wanted to protest Karapetian's cruel death and demand justice by placing his coffin in Edjmiadzin's central square. (NOTE: Edjmiadzin is the location of Armenia's Holy See and the residence of Armenia's supreme religious figure, the Catholicos. END NOTE.) They reconsidered, though, out of fear for their elder son who is still in hiding and being sought by police and allegedly by thugs in the employ of General Saroyan. Hetq also alleged in its March 21 report that in 2007 the same Zarzand Saroyan was involved in a hit-and-run with two 10-year-old boys that left one dead and the other crippled.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) Sadly this would not be the first time that members of the ruling elite have behaved as a law unto themselves or been involved in gruesome murders. We customarily hear reports several times per year of influential generals or oligarchs, or their families or retainers, being involved in violent altercations with average citizens unlucky or imprudent enough to get in their way. Such incidents are routinely swept under the carpet. Yerevan residents also still mention the 2001 incident in which an inebriated Georgian-Armenian man was beaten to death by President Kocharian's security detail after speaking flippantly to the president during a Yerevan jazz cafe concert. One member of the security detail was sentenced to probation for that incident. It is precisely incidents such as these that deepen Armenians' feelings of helpless rage that there is a class of wealthy and thuggish regime supporters who are effectively free to maim and kill ordinary citizens with impunity.

PENNINGTON